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Origin of the Historical Society of Southern California:

BY NOAH LEVERING.

[Read November 1, 1893.]

Soon after my arrival in Los Angeles in May, 1875, I learned there was no historical society in the State. After I had spent several months in and about Los Angeles, and made the acquaintance of many of the leading citizens, from whom I learned much of the early history of California, I was thoroughly convinced that this was a grand field for historical work and that steps should be taken at once to gather up and preserve the unwritten history which would be prolific with interest to those who should come after us. I suggested to several persons the propriety of the formation of an historical society, and was as often met with the reply that the effort would be fruitless, as people would not take sufficient interest to accomplish the object. I could not make up my mind to abandon the enterprise. During the week of the county fair in October, 1883, I resolved to make a determined effort, by canvassing the city for volunteers to organize a society. I was soon convinced that it was much easier to secure volunteers to quell a rebellion than to preserve the history of the same. When I called upon one of the wealthy citizens of the city and, after stating my business, I was asked, "Is there any money in it?" I said no. The reply was, "Well, I want nothing to do with things that there is no money in." I was disappointed but not discouraged. Believing that there were men of larger souls and more liberal minds, I continued my efforts. The first man that I found who took an interest in the project was Prof. Marcus Baker of the National Magnetic Observatory, which at that time was located in this city, near the State Normal School.

Prof. Baker was the first to enroll his name in a little book that I had provided to obtain signatures in. With many kind words of encouragement and wishes for my success, he sent me on my way rejoicing. After considerable time spent in canvassing, I secured the following additional names: R. H. Hewitt, 37 Banning St., Los Angeles; Horace Bell, Los Angeles; G. W. Ingalls, Vacaville, Cal.; Thomas A. Gary, 917 Downey Ave., Los Angeles; H. Fuller, Alosta, Cal.; J. B. Niles, Los Angeles; Joseph D. Lynch, Los Angeles; Horatio Rust, South Pasadena; F. M. Palmer, Los Angeles; Ira More, Los Angeles; John Mansfield, Los Angeles; twelve names in all

Having secured enough signers to organize, I consulted Mr. Rust in regard to the time and place for the first meeting. The Normal School building was selected as the place, the exact date of the time set for the meeting I have forgotten. I saw Prof. Ira More and obtained his office, in the Normal School building, for the meeting. The professor said he would have it lighted and in readiness for us.

On the evening appointed, I repaired to the professor's office at about 7 o'clock only to find it as dark as lost hope. My spirits, which had indicated a point far above zero, now suddenly dropped as far below, and I seated myself upon the steps in front of the building and began whistling, like a boy passing through a graveyard in a dark night, to keep up his spirits. I realized that I was a lost mourner at the grave of my hopes. While thus contemplating the gloomy prospect, I heard a racket in the basement of the building, which revived hope, and I was soon tending in that direction, where I found the janitor, who informed me that he knew nothing of the meeting but would light up, which he did at once. Soon after Col. Warner came in, a few minutes later H. Rust arrived, which were all that I now remember. Before adjourning we concluded to hold an adjourned meeting a few evenings later in the council chamber in Temple block, provided the room could be obtained. We resolved ourselves into a committee of the whole to make the necessary arrangements. The room was secured, I had a notice of the meeting inserted in each of the city papers and also personally notified a number of persons. Gen. Mansfield also interested himself in getting an attendance. On the evening of November 1, 1883, in the city court room, old Temple block, the following named gentlemen met for the purpose of organizing a historical society: Col. J. J. Warner, H. D. Barrows, N. Levering, Gen. John Mansfield, Prof. J. M. Guinn, Maj. C. N. Wilson, Ex Gov. J. G. Downey, Prof. Ira More, J. B. Niles, A. Kohler, Don Antonio F. Coronel, George Hansen, A. J. Bradfield, Maj. E. W. Jones and Prof. Marcus Baker. Col. J. J. Warner was elected president; Maj. C. N. Wilson, secretary. A committee was appointed to draft a constitution and by-laws, and from that evening dates the beginning of the Historical Society of Southern California. Its proceedings since then are all of record.